SEARCHING FOR CARE AT NONTRADITIONAL TIMES: 
LOW-INCOME MOTHERS’ DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES 
AND PERSPECTIVES ON CENTER-BASED CARE

Supported by OPRE Grant #90YE0199

ABBY LANE
Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy, The LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin
Motivation

- Nonstandard work hours are common among low-income parents
- Child care decision-making processes are complex and dynamic
  - Work schedules and employment are important components
- Center-based care is a key way that public policy supports families, particularly in Texas, but...
  - It’s not usually available at nontraditional times
Research Questions

1. What social, economic, and structural factors are important in child care decisions among low-income mothers working nonstandard schedules who have young children?

2. Compared to other groups of low-income mothers with nonstandard schedules, are the roles or importance of certain factors different for:
   a. Mothers working irregular schedules or
   b. Mothers with different family structures?

3. What are mothers’ perspectives on center-based child care during nontraditional hours, including its appeal and accessibility?
Research Methods

• Target sample
  – Low-income (<200% FPL) mothers of young children (< 6 years old) who reported working at least one job for pay that required work at nonstandard times (outside of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday-Friday)

• Recruitment
  – Posting/distributing flyers in public and nonprofit community organizations, child care centers, and on Craigslist
  – Paid advertisements on Facebook

• Qualitative data collection
  – Eligibility survey and short demographic survey
  – In-depth, semi-structured interviews in English
  – Deductive and inductive coding
Sample Description

• 20 mothers in Texas
• Typical mom: 29-30 years old, household size 3-4 people
  – 55% married/cohabiting
  – 45% single/dating/in a relationship
• Diverse by race/ethnicity
• Lower-income, lower-education
Sample Description

Mothers' Work Schedules (n = 20)

- Early Mornings: 8
- Weekdays: 18
- Evenings: 14
- Nights: 6
- Weekends: 20
- Irregular: 16

Source: Demographic survey

Mothers' Child Care Arrangements (n = 20)

- Other Parent: 10
- Other Relative: 12
- Daycare Center: 14
- Home-based Daycare: 8
- Head Start/EHS: 2
- Pre-K: 2
- Other: 4

Source: Eligibility survey, interviews
RQ 1. Decision-making Factors

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RQ 1. Nonstandard Work Schedules

- Opportunities
  - Ability to tag-team care
- Challenges
  - Careful balance of work and child care
  - Matching work schedules to availability and hours of operation (evenings, weekends)
  - Employer-based practices

“Our jobs, **we have to be there on the weekends no matter what.** So that’s another thing. It’s just a lot of [centers] don’t open on weekends.”

“I get my schedule two days before the first part of that schedule starts. So, …I have to have a babysitter tomorrow. And that’s my notice… **That’s a really short notice.**”
RQ 2. Irregular Schedules

• More irregularity leads to more challenges

“I used to have a set schedule, but I would do 6 am openings and closings to 10 pm depending on the day. And that was almost easier because then I could set things up… And now my position changed and so I’m picking up a lot of call-in shifts and vacation shifts. And it’s sort of expected at this point that I do that, and so, it’s almost every week that it’s a little bit different now. And it’s hard to plan ahead.”
RQ 2. Family Structure

• Importance of support system for single moms

“When you’re doing it by yourself it’s really hard. When you have a second person there to help it makes it so much easier. Because y’all can balance…I work when you’re at home and then when I come home, you go to work. …but since we’ve been split up, it’s been really hard…I don’t have options, I don’t have four or five people who are going to come take [my] four kids…So, it makes it very difficult.”
RQ 3. Center-based Care

- Key factors in likelihood of use:
  - Necessity
  - Family support system
  - Time of day/day of week
  - Potential benefits

- Barriers to access:
  - Cost
  - Availability

“But you have to pay the bills... As parents, we have to provide the best life for them and so if that means staying at work later, then that's just what we have to do.”

“It's a life saver. And I know like going into that place on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, I'm not the only person using it...You have to call ahead and make a reservation, because they know they're going to be packed.”
Summary

• Nonstandard work schedules add important challenges to the child care decision-making process:
  – Difficulty matching work schedules to care availability
  – More irregularity makes it more difficult to find and plan care
  – Support systems are vital

• Center-based care at nontraditional times is appealing to mothers, particularly on the weekends, but cost and availability remain important barriers
Contact

• Abby Lane: AbbyCLane@utexas.edu

• This research is supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Human Services (Child Care Research Scholars Grant Program, Grant #90YE0199)